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Edward F. Beale & the American West

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politics from 1844 on, but no one has ever denied this. Assessing the significance, staying power, and cause-and-effect consequences of sectionalism; the balance among sectional and non-sectional matters; and the timing of political changes, has been the issue. Maizlish has not given these matters the attention necessary to support his case. He relies too much on his particular reading of somewhat slippery and certainly ambiguous evidence, rather than first anchoring all of that in close attention to observed behavior. His occasional introduction of quantitative evidence is perfunctory and half-hearted. At the same time, his focus on political leadership usefully reveals part of the story but can distort understanding of the rest of a complex, multitiered, interactive, political system.

Without close examination of all parts of the political world, and without a weighing of proportions and significance, the case remains dangling and unpersuasive. It is not that quantitative methods and a measured consideration of the mass electorate usefully address every historical problem, but when the political structure and the nature of electoral cleavages are under consideration, they certainly do firm up matters. Simply, it would be possible to go over the same ground and give the argument a much different cast—one more grounded in other evidence that seems more persuasive than what Maizlish presents. Too much of that evidence suggests that neither a loss of faith in the parties, nor sectionalism alone, affected the mass of each party's supporters, or the political structure as a whole, as strongly as Maizlish argues. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that historians have as yet fully comprehended either Ohio's, or the North's, antebellum political experience.

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Edward F. Beale & the American West, by Gerald Thompson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983. xvi, 306 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Gerald Thompson has rescued Edward Fitzgerald Beale from the obscurity to which an inadequate biography published over seventy years ago assigned him. Beale was a remarkable figure in the history of the American West. He was a genuine hero of the Mexican War who served as a young naval officer under Commodore Robert F. Stockton and later as a leader of the land forces of General Stephen Watts Kearny. After the war, Beale carried news and samples of the gold discovery to the East, thus helping to arouse a powerful interest in California. In 1852 Beale was appointed the first Superintendent

of Indian Affairs for California. As such, he made his most important contribution to western history: he established the prototype for the modern reservation system of the United States. Beale next entered politics in San Francisco, where he served as a leader of the law and order forces in opposition to the 1856 Committee of Vigilance. The following year, Beale became the superintendent of a federal wagon-road project and experimented with camels as a means of transportation in the deserts of the American Southwest. Abraham Lincoln appointed Beale in 1861 to serve as Surveyor General of California and Nevada. After the Civil War, Beale divided his time between California and the East. He became active in Republican party affairs in Pennsylvania and in 1872 he relocated his base of operations to the Decatur House in Washington, D.C. There he held forth as a host for the rich and famous until his death in 1893.

Gerald Thompson's narrative style enhances the drama and excitement of Beale's episodic career. Thompson's treatment of the Battle of San Pasqual is illuminating, and he fills his accounts of Beale's numerous transcontinental treks with realistic detail. He offers a clear sense of the sights and sounds along the Santa Fe and Gila trails of the late 1840s. Beale's life is also worth recounting if for no other reason than for its fascinating intersections with other notable men and women of the nineteenth century. Among Beale's friends and acquaintances were Bayard Taylor, Bret Harte, Kit Carson, Joaquin Miller, Mary Austin, Ulysses S. Grant, and Thomas Hart Benton.

The most challenging task of any biographer is to assess motivation and character. Thompson ascribes two motivating forces to Beale: a desire to seek adventure and a drive to become a "man of rank" (9). These forces sometimes contradicted one another in Beale's life and in later years the latter motivation became ascendant. Beale's motives in his most important assignment—as Superintendent of California Indian Affairs—were typically mixed. Although his plan for a reservation system apparently was rooted in humanitarian concern, the government removed him from office amid charges of mismanagement and corrupt dealings. Thompson lays out the charges and countercharges in the dispute over Beale's actions, but leaves uncertainty as to Beale's guilt or innocence. Thompson implies that Beale was guilty only of carelessness rather than of an actual attempt to defraud the government. Yet as the author reveals the record of Beale's later misdeeds, a pattern of corruption appears which must at least raise doubts about Beale's integrity as Indian superintendent. Because of similar malfeasance charges Beale also later lost his post as surveyor general.

Thompson's analysis of Beale's character is somewhat unsatisfy-

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ing. In his conclusion, Thompson summarizes Beale's record of public service: "He endeavoured to profit from every government position he held and was successful in that effort" (240). Yet Thompson argues that, in so doing, Beale was simply following "accepted practice" (154). His actions in office conformed to "nineteenth-century standards of public morality" (155). If so, then why did two presidents summarily dismiss Beal from office?

The design of *Edward F. Beale & the American West* is attractive and appropriate for its subject. The placement of illustrations and maps, however, is troublesome. Rather than placing them at appropriate points in the text, the author groups them together in two locations. This renders the maps ineffective because they appear long after the narrative passages they might elucidate. There is also a surprising number of typographical errors in the text. Yet before publication of this biography, Edward F. Beale was little known other than as a humane Indian superintendent and a quixotic promoter of camel caravans. Gerald Thompson now has given us a full-length, full-color portrait of Edward Beale. This portrait reveals a man whose venality undercut whatever greatness he may have been able to achieve. Rescued from obscurity, Beale now must suffer the whips and scorns of being known.

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